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ABSTRACT

The concept of lifelong education is discussed in this the last of four transcripts of radio programs on college today. Dialogue is presented in the following area: Ronald Gross on lifelong learning; the old view of lifelong learning; the view of the President of the University of Rhode Island; classes on the Long Island Railroad (Adelphi University's "education on wheels"); view of Hy Hirsh, director of the Institute for Retired Professionals, a part of the New School in New York City; adjustment problems of one older student; comments by I.F. Stone, a 70-year-old student; educational brokering; APEL (assessment of prior experiential learning) at American University; work/learn combinations; the Lifelong Learning Act; and lack of federal support for lifelong learning. (SPG)

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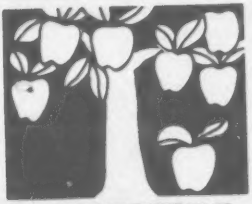

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"COLLEGE TODAY, PART IV: LIFELONG LEARNING"

CHILD: A...

CHILD: B...

CHILD: C...

MAN: D...

WOMAN: H...

MAN: I...

MAN: J...

CHILD: K...

MAN: L...

TEENAGER: M...

WOMAN: N...

WOMAN: O...

WOMAN: P...

MERROW: T-I-O-N-S -- Options -- OPTIONS IN EDUCATION. From the ABC's of pre-school to the alphabet soup of government programs, this is OPTIONS IN EDUCATION.

* * *

WOMAN: I think in th s age bracket, we hear, people get the feeling that, well, "fold up and just stay home." But when you get into school you find that you can relate to these younger people. And I thought of course, now I'll be rejected when I go there; I'll be pushed around by the young people -- you know how we do, we get pushed around a lot at this age. But I found that wasn't the case at all.

REINHARDT: Chances are, say, 10 years ago, the only people over 70 years old you found on a college campus were the trustees.

MERROW: But take another look, today. That woman who returned to college in her 70s is one of many people who no longer see colleges as places for 18 to 22 year-olds exclusively.

REINHARDT: People now live longer and stay healthier than ever before. Many go back to school -- to avoid the boredom of retirement, to train for a second career, to pick up interests they dropped years ago.

MERROW: And old people aren't the only ones re-educating themselves. Housewives whose children have all moved away decide to begin law school.

REINHARDT: A businessman who's after a promotion takes a leave of absence to complete the MBA program he dropped out of 10 years earlier.

MERROW: What's changed is the image of education as a spigot that's turned off at a certain age. The new, popular phrase is lifelong learning -- learning at any age. I'm John Merrow.

REINHARDT: I'm Barbara Reinhardt. And this week on OPTIONS IN EDUCATION: an hour of lifelong learning.

MERROW: For openers -- how new is "lifelong learning?" After all, schools have been in the adult education business for years. What's so new about lifelong learning?

REINHARDT: What's new is that four-year colleges and universities -- which used to view "continuing education" as a kind of plague on academia -- are now doing their best to encourage older learners to enroll there.

MERROW: Lifelong learners are also lifelong tuition payers.

REINHARDT: Enrollment of high school graduates is down at most colleges; budgets have been slashed; teachers and entire degree programs have been cut. Older students -- whether they're after degrees or not -- at least help to fill empty classrooms, and by enticing them with an array of special interest courses, colleges hope to lure many people away from night schools and community colleges.

MERROW: You, four-year colleges are about the last to jump onto the lifelong learning bandwagon. It's kind of ironic that the earliest promoters of the notion did not equate lifelong learning with going back to school. In his book, The Lifelong Learner, Ronald Gross encourages people to continue their education. But, as he told reporter Glenn Mitchell, they don't necessarily have to do it at a college.

RONALD GROSS ON LIFELONG LEARNING

GROSS: I see learning as a tool for life change, as a way of making your life more enjoyable for you, making yourself more interesting to other people, learning how to do those things that you most want to do, become those things that you most want to become. So to me learning, this kind of learning that I'm describing, is very different from what we remember as our schooling where most of us had the feeling it's for "them" that we're doing all of this, and someone is telling us -- big daddy is telling us -- that you must learn this and that because we know this is the thing to learn and this is the way to learn it and then we'll test you on it.

This is completely different. In this, you're the boss, and this is for us and it's for each person to decide what their own learning should be because it derives from what they want and need.

MITCHELL: It seems that throughout the book what you're saying is that what you don't need is the classroom; what you do need is the will. Do you think that most people have that will?

GROSS: I think we know that they have much more of it than they think. Recent research has shown that there's a remarkable amount of learning that each of us does in our everyday life that we're not even aware of, partly because we have been conditioned by schooling to think that we're only learning when we're being taught. But social scientists, for the first time, have gone down to the streets and asked people what they've learned recently, and asked it with some sensitivity and some precision. And the results are astounding. They have found that the average person engages in some seven or eight learning projects every year. These are deliberate, extended, successful endeavors to change themselves in some way, to learn something specific. And each of these efforts takes some hundred hours which means that the average person is devoting some 700 hours a year or two hours a day to learning, which sounds astonishing at first, I mean, how can that be? Where is that going on? But when you examine it carefully and realize that we're talking about not just academic subjects, but all kinds of self-change projects then we're talking about things like a mother learning about the development of two year-olds in regard to her own child over an extended period of time, and through various media: books, magazine articles, television programs, talking with people, et cetera; her own analysis and reflection.

We're talking about a person studying what they need to know to invest their money in stocks or otherwise, a continuing effort of many people on which the success or failure is much more than a grade. We're talking even about a person spending four or five hours on a weekend working on their backhand on the tennis court. Each of us can use all of the kinds of ways that we know we've learned in everyday life to measure our learning. And if we want to, we can also get college credit and even a college degree for this learning now because the colleges and universities have finally begun to admit that all of this learning is going on and is real and just as valuable as what goes on in the classroom; so that now, for the first time, you can, either through examination or through other kinds of evaluation, you can get college credit for what

you learn in your life, your work, in your interests and hobbies, and have that add up to a good part of a college degree.

REINHARDT: Ronald Gross, author of The Lifelong Learner. He was interviewed for OPTIONS IN EDUCATION by Glenn Mitchell of station KERA, Dallas, Texas.

MERROW: Gross mentioned credit for life experience. That's a phrase popping up in college catalogues throughout the country.

REINHARDT: Here's the idea. If I've owned a grocery store for 10 years and decide to return to school for a few management courses, why should I have to take basic Accounting 101 courses first?

MERROW: Or let's say I've worked for several years as a volunteer at a nursing home. Then I decide to get a degree in social work. Shouldn't the college waive some of the requirements for that degree, based on my "life experience" as a volunteer?

REINHARDT: Many college administrators are now recruiting lifelong learners. They've even developed special departments that examine your "life experience" and decide what it's worth in college credits.

MERROW: But the welcome mat hasn't always been out for lifelong learners.

THE OLD VIEW OF LIFELONG LEARNING

GEMMELL: A decade ago, continuing education students were looked upon as second class. I had experience in some classes in which those students were even viewed as kind of non-entities. If they wanted to ask a question, okay, but they were kind of ignored. They were not given the same degree of respect as someone who was sitting there for 12 or 15 hours a semester.

REINHARDT: That's J. Christopher Gemmell of the American Association of Colleges and Universities.

GEMMELL: Continuing education has been viewed as a step-child at best. I think that attitude is beginning to change. There seems to be number of campuses where the need to open their doors to new clientele has mandated that they make certain concessions or changes in their approach to a student body. I think that it is no secret that higher education has been confronted with difficult financial times. The fact that they need to reach out to a new client group is one means of assuaging what could be a very trying time for them otherwise. But it is not the panacea for their problems. And I think that we have to realize that the extensive growth experienced particularly in the state colleges and universities in the United States in the 1960s is something which is being arrested in the 70s. We are not seeing extensive building programs, faculty are not growing by leaps and bounds, the student body of course is declining in enrollment. And so there is going to have to be a finely honed restructuring of the institution.

Classes are now being held in factories, warehouses, in the backs of stores. Here is Washington there are courses being held in department stores. And it's kind of a catch as catch can. And higher education has to learn to respond to this new need.

REINHARDT: J. Christopher Gemmell of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities in Washington, D.C.

MERROW: Are colleges responding to the need? Here's a selection from the course catalog of the Center for Lifelong Learning at Hunter College in New York.

REINHARDT: Feminine Symbolism and the Archetype of Woman.

MERROW: How to Successfully Buy, Sell, and Invest in Antiques.

REINHARDT: The Augmented Self

MERROW: Franchising Options for the Small Entrepeneur

REINHARDT: Now, until recently, you'd never expect to see those sorts of sourses offered at a university. Frank Newman, president of the University of Rhode Island, says that because four-year colleges need tuition money, they've dropped their biases against part-time, continuing education students.

THE VIEW OF A COLLEGE PRESIDENT

NEWMAN: In 1971, one of the things we said that caused very strong antagonism, a lot of criticism from within the higher education community, was that we ought to break the academic lock-step. By that we meant that students ought to be now only allowed, but in many cases encouraged, not to go directly from pre-school to kindergarten to elementary school to secondary school to undergraduate years to graduate years to post-doctoral training and then finally into the world. We said that has deleterious effects for most, not all, but most students. People thought that was really an abominable thing to say.

MERROW: Saying that you should break the lock-step.

NEWMAN: Yes. We were arguing that to discriminate against students that had... Because all of the evidence showed that students who broke it were usually better students, more motivated, more sure of what they wanted to do, and so on. There was a great deal of evidence then, and there's even more now. Nowadays, to make that statement publically generates a loud, large yawn, and people wonder why on earth you'd ever raise that issue. Business schools, for examples, pride themselves on the number of students that are coming in, not from their undergraduate -- directly out of their undergraduate experience, but out of business, with several -- three, four, ten -- years of experience. Same with law schools, same with medical schools. Ph.D. programs. In other words, it's no longer an issue. There's been a huge change in American higher education.

MERROW: But they didn't see the light because of your eloquent prose or because of the rationality of someone's ideas. Economic pressure, yes?

NEWMAN: No question. And I make no argument that people saw the light because of our eloquent prose. I think anyone who argued that would be a fool. You'll see many institutions -- in fact, one has already seen many institutions moving into this area because they need more students. But, I think it is good for the universities in many ways. One of them is that these students tend to be very focused, very motivated, very able. Much more so than they were ever given credit for in the earlier days. In fact, that was one of the reasons we opposed the whole academic lock-step routine, was that it denegrated this very kind of student. But there's another factor which is, is it good for society? My very strong sense is that it's not only good for society, but essential for the American concept of society. The American system demands that you have repeated chances to grow, develop, and make the most of your talent. So we can say to you, "It's okay. Go to Podunk U., do what you want, be a bartender. If you really get excited, okay, the opportunitie's there for you." And, in fact, that's what's happening more and more.

REINHARDT: Frank Newman, president of the University of Rhode Island.

MERROW: Well, lifelong learning sounds like a great success story. People of any age feel free to return to college at any time -- for whatever reason. And colleges stay solvent by registering all of these lifelong learners into their otherwise emptying classrooms.

REINHARDT: Or by bringing the classroom to the student. NPR's Bill Toohey takes us to one rather unorthodox educational setting in New York.

TOOHEY: (train bells) The Long Island Railroad's 5:14 train from New York to Speonk looks like a lot of the railroad's other equipment. Much of it is aging and worn. It clatters and lurches along the track, carrying thousands of commuters home every day. But the 5:14 has something more to offer its passengers than the bar car.

TEACHER: If you're in the business of fragrance and cologne, you don't start out by, somebody says, "Here's a fragrance." Not at all. It starts with what concept or image do we want to help person achieve...

TOOHEY: That's Professor Gregory Guttman of the Adelphi University

School of Business. I recorded him leading a seminar called "Creative Approaches to Business Problems" on the 5:14. It's one of several courses offered to commuters on the train, all leading to an MBA. Adelphi began the program in 1972. Faced with declining enrollments at its main campus, it decided to offer what it calls "Adelphi on Wheels." Since then, about 600 students have taken courses while commuting to and from work. One hundred and fifty of them have got degrees. The courses are now available on four suburban commuter lines. It costs $113 a credit, the same as campus courses. And for the students, it seems a real break. Dennis Stillman just completed his MBA work. He says the train is a lot more convenient than traditional night school.

STILLMAN: I think the greatest benefit of the experience of riding on the train is the convenience of commuting and studying at the same time, given that we have to spend an hour a day commuting each way; it's a great utilization of time.

TOOHEY: But what about the environment here? I mean, this is not the Yale campus.

STILLMEN: Well, there are inconveniences, but on the other hand, most of us are business people. We're not accustomed to academia, as such, and we recognize that there are going to be inconveniences. But at the same time, there are many, many time savings for people who have little time to spare.

TOOHEY: The courses can only be held on those trains that have a long run with no stops. On the 5:14 for example, the train goes for a hour and ten minutes before its first stop out of New York, the town of Babylon. That's the time the fifteen or twenty students in each class get their lectures. Like Dennis Stillman, most of them are Manhattan office workers, anxious to move their careers ahead through some additional academic credit, even if it means getting those credits on a noisy and uncomfortable commuter train. On most of the cars, the professor has a small public address system so the students can hear him. The instructor has a desk, bolted to the floor. But the students sit in conventional passenger train seats. There are no facilities for audio-visual equipment and no maps or charts; only a single blackboard. But among the students I spoke to, there seemed to be a genuine fondness for it all. They prefer this to the traditional situation in the company of younger students. Wayne Gerlip, in fact, likes the train so much he completed his BA and an MBA while commuting.

GERLIP: If anything, I like this program better for the lack of bureaucracy and contact you have with the larger institution. I've had it both ways. Earlier when I was going to school at the City University, I had a brief opportunity to go full-time. I did it and got out of it very quickly because I was older and I did not feel comfortable at all in that situation, and I have found overall, the quality of the instructor is far superior in the evening courses.

TOOHEY: Why is that, do you think?

GERLIP: Because many of them are full-time businessmen, as opposed to full-time instructors. And it's fine to get the theory that a full-time instructor can give you and some insight into the business world; but I find it better to get the theory and a lot of in-depth insight into how the real world functions. And a part-time evening lecturer can usually bring that into a course and make it much more valuable.

TOOHEY: The program is heavy on what its students like to call "the real world." It has a faculty pool of about 30 instructors, but 60 percent of them are part-timers. All in all, there are few frills, but overcoming the obstacles seems to have drawn the group together. George Friedlander told me a real closeness has developed in the group.

FRIEDLANDER: I found a comradeship in this course that I never found in any classroom situation. I found it on a team as an undergraduate, but never in a classroom situation at all. There was much mutual helping. I'm very fond of four or five of the guys I took classes with. It was just a beautiful experience, really.

TOOHEY: The university runs the courses on a budget of $200,000 per year. The cars are rented from a private concern called "Edu-tran" that leases

them from the Long Island Railroad. Depending on the car, they cost "Edu-tran" 12 to 15 thousand dollars a year. But neither "Edu-tran" nor the university has real control over the cars. They can keep other passengers out, but they can't protect them from vandals. One car had its sound system ripped out in the railroad yard. And so, Adelphi is looking for another system, and is looking at specially designed busses. Professor Guttman is director of the program for the university.

GUTTMAN: I would like to see a magnificant mobile laboratory in there with magnificant seats, and carpet, and all of that. And more sound-proofing. Sure, I would love that. But right now it's not in the cards because of the problems with the railroads inherent. And that's one of the reasons why, after all these years, we said "Is there a better way." We're always asking the question, "Is there a better mousetrap?" And not we're looking into the development of the busses, which will provide direct access into Manhattan. That's why we think the environment on the bus will even be improved now.

TOOHEY: Ultimately then, the 5:14 to Speonk will be replaced by quiet, air conditioned busses. And Adelphi doesn't plan on letting them go to waste. When the busses aren't being used by commuters, they will be driven to industrial parks. There they'll be used as mobile classrooms. Adelphi hopes this way it can even reach those workers who don't have the traditional rapid transit commute. This is Bill Toohey in New York. (train bells)

STUDENT: To tell the truth, I never think about my age. Only when I look in the mirror. Otherwise, I feel as young as I always did. I think that you should become involved and interested in something new all the time. Think of new viewpoints. Become interested in people who have better, I mean, a newer concept of things to come. And just keep on growing.

* * *

MERROW: Probably, the most publicized aspect of lifelong learning is the idea that a lot of people in their 60s, 70s, and 80s are now going to college.

REINHARDT: But the statistics to support this notion are hard to find, if they exist at all. In fact, the National Center for Educational Statistics still doesn't consider the number of older people on campus to be significant enough to count.

MERROW: We did learn, from the U.S. Census Bureau, though, that between 1972 and 1976, there was about a 60 percent leap in the number of college students 55 and older, from 81,000 in 1972 to 127,000 in 1976. But that's still only about one percent of everybody going to college.

REINHARDT: The Census Bureau did not ask people to specify whether they enrolled part-time or full-time, or whether they chose a community college or a university. So there's no way to use these figures to measure the impact of an older population on four-year schools.

MERROW: But there's another set of statistics on the minds of college administrators, and that's the overall shift in this country toward an older population.

REINHARDT: In 1900, only nine in every hundred Americans was over 55. By the year 2000, 21 of every hundred Americans will be over 55.

MERROW: Not only are colleges recognizing the opportunities for enrolling many of these so-called "senior citizens." Many colleges use their own form of consciousness raising to convince older people that their still capable of getting something out of college.

REINHARDT: Hy Hirsch directs the Institute for Retired Professionals, a part of the New School in New York City. Part of what he does to attract both students and private contributions as well is to explain that for many people, returning to college is a necessity -- to fill the emptiness of retirement.

HY HIRSCH, OF THE NEW SCHOOL

HIRSCH: The retired person has very little content in his life talk about with his peers. When he's working, most of us at our work, most of the conversation is really shop talk. And the friends you make are shop friends, whether it's at a university or any other place, or lawyers or doctors and so on. They're most comfortable with their co-workers, people who are engaged in the same occupation. When you retire, you no longer have that shop talk. So that what happens is, with most retired people, their talk turns onto the little minutiae of daily living. And the average person who's had an important occupation, a professional occupation, feels a tremendous let-down; it's part of the trauma of retirement. I'm sure you're all familiar with the garbage that you get and a lot of the gobblety-gook that you get in so-called science research, especially in the social sciences. But psychologists are agreed -- they use the word "disengagement" when you get older, or when pass sort of a magic figure of 65, you're supposed to retire. It's an unfortunate word. It's copied, really, from the idea of you physically disengaging in some way or other. The result is you disengage psychologically and socially, and then you have a tremendous trauma, a terrific hiatus.

I would like to see that there shouldn't be any kind of a break like that, that we have less of the dollar sign in our occupational lives, more of the living time that should be devoted to ideas of learning and the mind; so therefore you don't have that kind of break in the continuity of living, because it's a totality of living we should look at.

REINHARDT: The Institute for Retired Professionals, the IRP, calls its students "members." In fact, they must be retired professionals -- doctors, lawyers, teachers, et cetera, and they must be elected for admission to the school by an entrance committee.

MERROW: Most of the time, the members are in classes with their peers. But there is a requirement that students take one course per semester with younger students.

REINHARDT: And that mix of ages in one class is in itself a learning experience, according to Hy Hirsch.

HIRSCH: I can't imagine a healthier environment that in one of our groups, say the Shakespeare reading group, young people come in and read Shakespeare with us; read the plays, read the parts. Do something together of an intellectual nature. Or a philosophy group, they come in and they bring their own ideas. I'll never forget one session we had, this very session, when O'Neill plays were being discussed in a theatre group. Some young people strolled in and sat there. And every one of our people in the audience had seen practically all of O'Neill's plays on Broadway because this is our generation, our theatre generation. And the young people sat there with their eyes wide; this was a foreign country to them. We were talking about Ah, Wilderness and whatnot, and they didn't know what this was all about.

REINHARDT: Hy Hirsch, Director of the Institute for Retired Professionals at the New School in New York.

* * *

STUDENT: I'm keeping pace with my oldest granddaughter and she's so proud of the fact that I'm reading what she's reading. So that I feel that I've gained new stature in her eyes, and my own; my self-image has improved.

STUDENT: At this stage of my life, all of a sudden many things come, run together. You see connections between developments in politics and art and literature. You see parallels in the development of music and modern painting. And all of these ideas come and they culminate and give you what I would call a close picture of the world, how it culturally hangs together.

STUDENT: You see, most people my age are quite lonely. And one has some old friends, but they get less and less. And here I find new friends. It's very valuable for me.

STUDENT: Retirement is not pleasant for a great many people. I know I had a great deal of difficulty adjusting to it. And this, as I say, I'm

only in my first year. They tell me the first year is a hard one; and for me it has been.

* * *

MERROW: One criticism of lifelong learning programs is that once they enroll older people in classes, the programs do nothing to help them re-adjust to college life after their 10, 20, or even 20-year break.

REINHARDT: One critic, Phyllis Robinson, returned to college late in her life, and was disappointed that no one helped smooth the way for a bit.

MERROW: She's now with the Institute of Gerontology at the University of the District of Columbia. Part of what she does is suggest the ways colleges should change when they accept older students into classes. She talked with Natalie Iglitz about adjustment problems -- her own and those of others.

ADJUSTMENT PROBLEMS OF ONE OLDER STUDENT

ROBINSON: It was quite a shock to see the system of, well, computerized courses and registration, and the fact, to be just one of the mob again was rather a shock. One of the things that I found very difficult was that there was a great deal of social science research which had taken place since I left college in 1941. And I was not really aware of the extent of this knowledge. And when I went back to school, I had a very difficult time because the younger students already had that kind of conceptual knowledge, which I really was only half aware of. So I had a pretty rough time the first semester, but after that I was able to recuperate.

IGLITZ: How well prepared were your teachers, and maybe counselors at the university, how well prepared were they to handle these difficulties?

ROBINSON: Well, it was amusing because I discovered that I was older than all of my teachers. (laughs) And yet I was looking up to them as sort of father figures and mother figures; whereas, I was really older than they and had had in some instances very wide experience in foreign countries and in life which they really had no sense of. However, after a few difficulties, we did get along very well.

IGLITZ: Now somehow through this experience you got attuned to the sorts of problems that people have returning to school after many years of not being in school, and decided to make that your work in large part. Is it possible to generalize about older people going back to school and say "Here are some of the things that they really have to go through and attune themselves to when they go back to school, or even before they make the decision to go back to school."

ROBINSON: Well, I think that there is a mind-set that you have to get into. And that is, you're not the head of household, you're not the mother, you're not the wife, you're not the board member of the hospital, you're not the honored volunteer with the Red Cross; you're just one of the gang. You're just one of the students. And there's a certain amount of self-effacement that you have to put yourself in from being a person who has built a lot of contacts and a lot of prestige in the community. You go back to the college community and you're just one of the gang. I think it's important that schools and colleges form groups for older students. I think that students need a sense, older students particularly, need a sense of belonging. I think one of the problems with older people going back to school is that they're scared.

As a teacher of many older students myself, I try to announce the very first day of class that my technique for older adult education is to make it a relaxed and a fun process. And I say the only things I really want you to memorize are very few and far between. What I want you to do is to be able to know where to look things up if you need them. And if the older students have difficulty writing, I allow them to turn papers in ahead of time for my criticism and suggestions, and then I hand those back and let them work on it some more.

IGLITZ: Is it at all deflating to the ego of any older person, though, to sit in a class and be told those things, and get the impression that I have

to be treated differently; "They're doing this because they think I can't keep pace with younger students."

ROBINSON: Well, actually we have the same problems with younger students, I must say. There are younger students who have the same difficulties. I have some older students who are really excellent; they're better than the younger students. But of course, we're dealing with a population that has not had access, by and large, to higher education before. What comes to mind is, one time a night watchman came to our office. He said, "I see 'Gerontology' on the door." He said, "I know that means studies in aging. Does that mean older people can also study gerontology?" And I talked to him quite a long time, and he's turned out to be a really good student, and he's not almost through a master's degree. But the fact that he came in and took courses in studies in aging helped him to reverse the negative stereotypes that he had about himself as an older person.

MERROW: Phyllis Robinson, of the Institute of Gerontology of the University of the District of Columbia, speaking with Natalie Iglitz.

I.F. STONE, A 70-YEAR OLD STUDENT

STONE: You know, in many societies there's been a tradition that old age is a time for study. In India, it's been felt for millennia that when you finished your duties as a father and a householder and a citizen, you take a beggar's bowl and go out to the world and meditate on God, on destiny.

REINHARDT: Journalist I.F. Stone. He's just turned 70, and not that he no longer publishes his weekly journal, he's found a new intellectual challenge -- studying classical Greek literature at American University in Washington, D.C.

STONE: There are many societies in which learning is regarded as a pleasure and old age as a time when we have the leisure and the opportunity to indulge in that pleasure because we don't have the same pressing obligations of raising a family.

IGLITZ: Yet, the compulsion seems to be, at least from a younger person's point of view, to look forward to stopping or restin when you get older. Does that change from your perspective? Did you ever have that feeling when you were younger?

STONE: Well, I should think if a young person isn't interested in his studies, naturally he'd like to get them over with. If his studies are just a bitter pill to be swallowed, he doesn't know anything about learning. And naturally, a person who's that way will not understand why anybody would talk the trouble to go to college unless they had to. But anybody who's gone to college and caught the excitement -- caught the excitement -- I mean, it's like entering new worlds; the world of astronomy, the world of mathematics, the world of science, the world of the great classics, the world of literature, the world of history. These are wonderful worlds, and to enter them is to be enchanted and illuminated and enriched. Anybody who feels that way about learning doesn't need any explanation about why anybody, old or young, would be interesting in doing it. And I think that older people can have a lot of fun and enrich their minds, and keep the muscles of their minds working by going back to school. I think it's a wonderful way to stay young, and it's a wonderful way to make old age, in many ways, the most wonderful part of your life.

REINHARDT: I.F. Stone, speaking with Natalie Iglitz in Washington, D.C.

MERROW: People who return to school after a long stint as an as an accountant, or a housewife, or an engineer may be surprised to learn that they can skip certain required courses because their "life experience" is an acceptable substitute.

REINHARDT: Who decides what life experience is worth in college credits? There are agencies that do it -- like that Regional Learning Service in Syracuse, New York. Joan Salesman of station WCNY in Syracuse spoke with Dorothea Nelson, a learning consultant who describes the process called "educational brokering."

"EDUCATIONAL BROKERING"

NELSON: Educational brokering is an attempt to match up the resources that are offered in the educational community or communities in an area with the consumers, the learners who want to participate in some way or other in the educational function. Nowadays, since the second world war particularly, there are many more ways for an adult to continue his or her education. That creates all kind of new opportunities. It's also a bit bewildering when you're trying to choose among the proliferation of options that exist; which thing is the right thing for you? The broker -- the individual brokering agency attempts to help that consumer of education know a little bit more about what's behind all those educational choices so that an intelligent decision can be made about which course he or she wishes to pursue.

SALESMAN: Then they are actually an intermediary.

NELSON: They are an intermediary, a link. It's a service to bring together the educational resources of the community and the learner. And it's for adults at many, many educational levels. It may in one instance be for the adult who never completed a high school diploma. In central New York alone, 43 percent of adults over 25 do not have that educational credential. On the other hand, it may be for a person who already has a bachelor degree, a master's degree, a Ph.D. degree and yet wants to continue. It may also be for a person who has no degree interest in mind, who just wants to take advantage of some of the new kinds of educational programs that exist.

SALESMAN: Who weighs what is the credit of a person's life? How do you evaluate that?

NELSON: You're talking about credit for life experience, that great bug-a-boo to many people. Well, that's not an easy thing for me to just give a categorical answer to. There are ways, though, through many kinds of independent study programs for a person to get some credit for life experience. It's not a snap. You're life experience has to be assessed so that it can match up with what colleges will call a learning experience. You have to have shown some measurable gain in your education.

SALESMAN: Well could this, or isn't this a bit watered down? Could this be construed as watering down education?

NELSON: I don't think so, although I'm sure that many people would choose to say that. But if you look at it this way, Joan, I'm sure most of us realize that to sit in a classroom for the prescribed numbers of hours, to read (if you read) all the material, and to pass the exam, does not necessarily mean that a person has been educated. He's put in his time. That we can certainly say is true. Why should we not give credit for the time that's put in if we do indeed have to go to great lengths to demonstrate what this person has done on the job or at home? What matters is what the person has learned, not the setting in which the learning has taken place.

MERROW: Dorothea Nelson, of the Regional Learning Service, a non-profit agency in Syracuse, New York. She spoke with Joan Salesman of station WCNY in Syracuse.

REINHARDT: Educational brokering doesn't have to be done by a third party. Some colleges do it themselves.

MERROW: We asked reporter Karen Sughrue to drop in on one program at American University in Washington, D.C. It's called APEL: Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning.

APEL AT AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

SUGHRUE: The typical APEL student is a woman, age 39, with some college but no degree. She finds she can't get the job she wants without one. She spends a semester in the APEL program, taking two non-credit courses that polish up her rusty academic skills like note-taking and speaking out in class, and imitate the rigors of school with heavy reading and writing assignments. Lenore Saltman, director of APEL, says the program allows students to make the transition back to college with a big advantage -- from one to 30 college credits under their belts. At the end of the semester, the students compile

what the program calls a portfolio. This is the most important element since it's on the basis of that college credits for life experiences are assigned. Saltman says the students begin by listing the events of their lives chronologically. . .

SALTMAN: . . .then we ask them to take these activities, cluster them, tell what they've learned, and they have to build -- they have to explain how each experience taught them more in a sense. Then they have to define the parameters of the experiences and the learning. In other words, where did it stop? Then, they have to take that learning and give it some kind of principle. They have to discuss the principle of what they've learned and see if they can apply it to another area. In other words, they've got to go beyond what they've learned and demonstrate its value or its use. I think they are going through a tremendous personal assessment, many of them. And that's for the one who is 25 as well as for the one who is 65 years old.

SUGHRUE: The burden of proof is on the students who must categorize their life experiences into what Saltman calls learning components, such as personnel management or mental health administration. These components fit into the framework of programs at university. It's then up to the faculty reviewers to decide how many credits those experiences are worth. As someone who spent four years in college and two years in graduate school at great expense to myself and my family, I asked Saltman if the APEL lets students sort beat the education system and maybe even cheapens the value of my degree.

SALTMAN: Well, first of all, we're not talking about a great deal of credit. We're talking about a max of 30 credits. Now, a regular baccalaureate degree at American University is 120 credits. So just for the assessment of prior learning, if the person earns a maximum amount, they can earn 30 credits. So we're talking about a very small piece of a baccalaureate degree, number one. Number two, what they do to develop that portfolio and have it assessed as rigorously as the papers you produced in class demonstrates learning that has taken place prior to college. What they are doing in the portfolio is synthesizing all that knowledge. I can't tell you that the time spent in one is equal to the other because if someone spends 10 years of their life doing mental health work and then is able to be assessed for it, I don't know that the sitting in class for one course and earning three credits is an equal experience. But there's been an amount of learning that takes place, and that's what the university does. It does credential learning.

SUGHRUE: Director Lenore Saltman, who says her adult students can save as much as a year of school and over a thousand dollars in tuition by earning credits for their lifelong learning experiences.

MERROW: That report was prepared by Karen Sughre of station WAMU in Washington, D.C.

* * *

STUDENT: One young man asked me one day, he said, "What is your major?" as if "What are you doing here, lady?" And I told him it was general studies. I said, "I'm learning to be a jack of all trades." I didn't tell him what I was trying to do was avoid losing all the credits I'd gained 20 years ago. This was a good way to get a degree, and I was also able to pick and choose the classes, to help me, that I really wanted. And he, you know, expressed real astonishment that I was even working for a degree. I think adult students are taking valuable time, because once you work 40 hours a week, and maybe you have a family and husband and so forth at home, and you've done all the laundry and all that, that time you give to class is precious time. And you're also spending your own money, not mom's and dad's, or a loan you know you're going to pay back after you graduate. And it's worth working for. As a matter of fact, my younger sisters, both of whom have degrees, my parents -- my parents are coming from Estes Park, Colorado for my graduation. I think it's beautiful. I said I'm going to have a big party and I'm going to everything -- the senior breakfast, the whole works.

* * *

MERROW: Lifelong learning advocates like to point out that education is non-stop. People should feel free to begin school at any time in their lives.

REINHARDT: In some ways, it's easy for a retired person to re-enroll -- easier than it is for a working person who may have trouble taking a leave of absence or trying to juggle two or three classes with a full-time job.

MERROW: Just as some people fear they'll be penalized at work if they borrow time to go to school, so do some college students feel the pressure to finish school and get a degree, even though they'd rather work now and go to school some other time.

REINHARDT: The National Manpower Institute brings together people from college and industry to try to create more flexible ways to work and learn. I talked with Paul Barton, of the National Manpower Institute.

WORK/LEARN COMBINATIONS

BARTON: There are two purposes of experience, of merging experience with formal education. And one is that the work experience is valuable, for youth particularly, as a way of easing them into regular employment, as a way of going about it gradually, rather than having to make the break -- on one day you're a full-time student, being treated like a hot house plant, and the next day, by some magic which is expected there, you're out on your own, looking for a full-time job. I think people get confused; I don't think it makes much sense to reward people through academic credit for just living or for life experiences. Only to the extent that those experiences actually produce the results that the educational objective had in mind. And there, we need to work out systems of educational credit, and a lot of that is being done.

The new Youth Employment Development Training Act requires the working out of credit systems for work experience for disadvantaged youth. And there's work going along that front now. And of course, the large project headed by Morris Keaton, the CAEL, the Cooperative Assessment of Experiential project, as it was first called, has as its major objective finding systems and techniques for assessing life experiences and figuring out how much of an education that translates into, particularly for those adults who are going back into school after being out a long time.

REINHARDT: Paul Barton of the National Manpower Institute in Washington, D.C.

MERROW: A lot of people were lifelong learners without knowing it. That is, they worked at a job and went to school part-time. And they may wonder whether there's any need for special lifelong learning programs.

REINHARDT: The idea though, is that a special program will attract people who otherwise wouldn't go to college.

MERROW: In, there's legislation under consideration in Congress that would appropriate money for lifelong learning. In 1976, then-Senator Walter Mondale proposed a Lifelong Learning Act, that would allocate $40,000,000 a year for five years.

REINHARDT: Ellen Hoffman helped write the legislation. Natalie Iglitz asked her just where that money was supposed to go.

THE LIFELONG LEARNING ACT

HOFFMAN: An attempt was made to try to encourage the federal government to look in a more systematic, and rational, and logical way at the things that already exist which serve the learning needs of adults; try to come up with better coordination of these programs; and try to figure out what the barriers are that prevent people from having access to these kinds of learning opportunities if they want them. So it's a mistake, I think, to try to say that the Lifelong Learning Act constituted a new program as such. What it was really trying to do, I think, was make some sense out of a lot of efforts that are already going on, not only on a federal level, but on state and local levels as well.

IGLITZ: Assuming though, that it's a free market and that there is a growing clientele for education in whatever form, whether it's to take continuing at a university, or a car repair course some place, or a community center course in painting, that more and more people are after that kind of

education -- won't the market take care of itself? Won't the courses automatically exist and make themselves known to people? Why do we need an additional puch at the federal level to do that sort of thing?

HOFFMAN: Okay, there are a couple of answers to that; let me answer your last question first, which is things are so duplicative and confusing at the federal level that it's very difficult as the situation exists now for people who are at the local level, or for individuals, to sort out what it is they might want to pick out or what they want to pursue. So there is a need at the federal level for that kind of activity. But the other question -- won't we have this whether or not the federal government gets into it -- I think poses the real challenge on the federal level, which is what is the particular role that the government can play? I happen to believe that there are things that need to be done if we're going to try to provide opportunities to all people in this country. And I think that perhaps the biggest and most important argument is what we call the equity argument.

It's that the people who most tend to get education in this country are the people who are already most educated. And we have accepted in our federal education policies the premise that the federal government will try to provide programs and help those people who do not have the financial ability or who face other sorts of barriers, such as everything from age to transportation, to ethnic group, which otherwise would prohibit them from getting the kind of education that they want or need. That's why I think it's important that there be some kind of federal role. We have traditionally used the federal government to plug in those gaps, to try to get rid of the loopholes that have kept minority and particularly low income groups -- and I think to a large extent, when you look at this area, people like the elderly -- from getting these kinds of benefits.

IGLITZ: What kinds of education are we talking about? Is it just everything? Or is it people going to college, colleges and universities as they exist? Are we talking about funding for whole different kinds of programs at community centers or apartment buildings or hospitals? Does lifelong learning take in all of that?

HOFFMAN: I assume that priorities would be put, and I think they belong, into these categories where we see a definite social and public need. And I would make that very broad, though. I would say it is not only a question of people going back to college, or back to vocational school, to get training for their job. I would include in that category help for senior citizens who don't know how to fill out a tax form. I would include a whole range or sort of health care and preventive health kinds of activities. And I would include a whole series of opportunities for women who have been at home raising children who want to enter the job market. So I think it is a concept which is far broader than simply returning to class in an existing institution and an existing program as we know it today. But that it is probably not likely that the federal government would get heavily into some of these kinds of things that people might consider to be frivolous.

MERROW: Ellen Hoffman, who helped write the Senate's Lifelong Learning Act in 1976.

REINHARDT: Enthusiasm for this legislation is not overwhelming, to say the least. After Mondale's proposal, the House and Senate agreed that some money should be devoted to lifelong learning. But things have changed, now that it's time to actually put up the money. A House subcommittee just voted that no money be authorized for lifelong learning.

MERROW: The proposal will travel further through the House and on to the Senate, but it's thought that the chances for getting some money are much slimmer now that one of the chief sponsors in Congress, Walter Mondale, has a different job.

REINHARDT: But there may be another reason for the lack of support in Congress. And that is, the concept is so fuzzy.

LACK OF FEDERAL SUPPORT FOR LIFELONG LEARNING

BUNTING: The federal Lifelong Learning Act makes it clear that they're talking about pre-school learning as well as learning beyond the traditional

college-going age. But I think most people are talking about learning for adults beyond the 18 to 22-year old college-going category.

MERROW: That's Dr. Charles Bunting, an official of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. His office provides money for lifelong learning projects.

BUNTING: The concept may have applicability from cradle to grave, as they say, but I think that for the time being, most people correctly understand the term to be referring to adults.

MERROW: Are you're saying, though, that lifelong learning is a useful term because it gets beyond the old idea of who's supposed to go to college? That there's a new group of people?

BUNTING: Yes, in part. It is also a useful term because it gets beyond the old idea of who can provide educational services.

MERROW: Wait a minute. That's been gone beyond a long time ago. Lots of things, lots of places provide educational services. Colleges are the johnny-come-latelys.

BUNTING: Well, that's true to some extent. But at the same time, it's important to hook them. Now that they are showing, for whatever motives, increased interest in this client group. If people are learning at the community center what previously colleges only provided credit for learning at their own institution or classroom, then it's important for people to get formal recognition for what they have learned.

MERROW: Okay, now let me turn that around a little bit and maybe be a bit skeptical and even a bit cynical. For years, colleges and universities were, in effect, arrogant about the whole thing. They didn't have to worry about what I need at age 36 or what you might need. Because, after all, there was a big enough pool of 18 to 24-year olds and that was the accepted age for going to college. So people our age went off and found what they wanted, either in books that they read or at the "Y" or whatever. And only now, when colleges are looking at that bottom line saying, "Oh-oh, we need bodies," only now are they turning and saying, "What should we be doing." In effect, the accusation I'm making is that colleges have not been acting in the public interest at all, but in their own private interest.

BUNTING: Well, healthy self-interest should exist for this to be a genuine movement, not something which is a flash-in-the-pan or something which is guided by the availability of dollars from the government or something like that. So I would like to put another coloring on your accusation. Colleges may think, legitimately, that they have services to offer to a much wider range of clientele. And we shouldn't necessarily condemn them for coming to a state of holiness late in life. In addition, over the last 20 or 30 years, even within the collegiate sector, alternative kinds of institutions and programs have been established to serve the wider range.

MERROW: But we're talking, sitting in an office in Washington, we're talking sort of idealistically about what we think should happen. But how do we know that something like that will happen? How do we know that colleges and universities won't simply shoe-horn these 35-year olds and 52-year olds and 73-year olds into the program for 18 and 23-year olds?

BUNTING: We have no guarantees or assurances. But many of the people who have been writing and thinking under the lifelong learning banner, among others, are trying to do everything they can to insure that that not happen.

REINHARDT: Charles Bunting, Deputy Director of The Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education, a federal program that supports many lifelong learning projects.

* * *

STUDENT: I wasn't ready, physically, mentally, emotionally ready to retire. And I had to look for something that would be mind-stretching as my job was.

STUDENT: When you went to college and you were pre-med, you know most of the pre-meds are greasy-grinds, and you have so many demanding laboratory courses that you don't have time for literature and you don't have time for theatre, and now you do.

TEACHER: There's an acute sense, I think, on the part of many people during this period of life that time is running out, and that they're going to have to hurry up if they're going to accomplish all the things that they want to accomplish in their life.

WRITER: Many of us have been convinced that we can't take command of our own education and go after those things we most want, and that we have to learn something in order to accomplish.

TEACHER: One of the problems with older people going back to school is that they're scared. Students need a sense, older students particularly, need a sense of belonging.

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REINHARDT: This OPTIONS IN ECUCATION program on lifelong learning is the last of a four-part series on "College Today."

MERROW: Part one was on changes in the college curriculum, part two on women's colleges, and part three on colleges that are shutting down.

REINHARDT: For transcripts of the entire four-part series, send two dollars to National Public Radio -- Education, Washington, D.C. 20036.

MERROW: We also have cassettes available, twenty dollars for the entire series, or five dollars for an individual program.

REINHARDT: Our schedule for the next three months is free for the asking.

MERROW: And when you write, for whatever reason, please tell us the call letters of your local NPR station.

REINHARDT: Material for this program came in part from Glenn Mitchell, station KERA, Dallas, Texas; Joan Salesman, WCNY, Syracuse, New York; Karen Sughrue, WAMU, Washington, D.C.; and Bill Toohey in New York.

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MERROW: This program was written by Natalie Iglitz.

REINHARDT: And produced by John Merrow. The Associate Producer is Katharine Ferguson, Assistant Producer Natalie Iglitz. Technical assistance for this program by Bob Nock. I'm Barbara Reinhardt.

MERROW: I'm John Merrow, and this is NPR, National Public Radio.

Music credit: J.S. Bach, selections from "The Well-Tempered Clavier, Books One and Two," (Malcolm Hamilton, harpsichord), Everest, 3134/6